

# Gender Equality



## Gender Equality in the European Social Fund 2007-2013

“Equal opportunities is a general principle for all actions undertaken not only by the ESF but by all Structural Funds. The new regulations take a step forward by combining a gender mainstreaming approach and specific actions targeted at women or men with ensuring that gender perspective is promoted at all stages of implementation of the Funds. They thus reflect more strongly the EU’s commitment to eliminate inequalities between women and men.”

### 1. BACKGROUND

Equality between women and men is a requirement for a European Union of growth, prosperity and solidarity in an equal and democratic society, in keeping with the new Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs.

Equal opportunities is also a **horizontal priority** for actions undertaken not only by the ESF but **by all Structural Funds** in the 2000-2006 programming period. This means that all programmes co-financed include indicators and project selection criteria to ensure that they are equally open to men and women. As far as ESF programmes are concerned, a two-pronged approach has been adopted: on the one hand, specific measures to support gender equality; on the other hand, a wider commitment to mainstreaming equal opportunities across all ESF actions and programme priorities. Integration of a gender perspective in a policy initiative or measure (gender mainstreaming) is a part of the majority of on-going activities supported by the Commission.

The **ESF supports measures to increase the involvement of women in the labour market**, thereby contributing towards the attainment of the Lisbon target for a female employment rate of 60% by 2010. Activities supported include career

development, access to new job opportunities, start-up of businesses, and the reduction of vertical and horizontal segregation of the labour market on the basis of sex. The ESF also finances accompanying measures aiming at providing care services for children and other dependents so that women and men can participate in training and other skills-upgrading activities. Support is furthermore provided for ensuring greater flexibility in delivery arrangements for education and training, and specific targeting of activities for women (e.g. business start-ups).

It must be underlined that there is also a significant number of non-Structural Funds initiatives which aim at reducing inequalities. **The Daphne II Programme** (2004-2008) supports organisations that develop measures and actions to prevent or to combat all types of violence against children, young people and women and to protect victims and at risk groups. The new integrated **Lifelong Learning Programme** (2007-2013) – which combines the previous Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci programmes – and the Youth in Action programme also support equality and gender mainstreaming in different projects. Moreover, in the face of persisting inequalities the Commission has proposed a **“Roadmap for**



### **equality between women and men 2006-2010"**

which was approved by the European Spring Council that also agreed to establish a European Pact for Gender Equality. It includes setting up a new €50 million **European Institute for Gender Equality**, improving governance for gender equality, reviewing all existing EU gender equality law, increasing awareness of gender inequality, ensuring gender equality is considered in all policies and pressing for better statistics. The roadmap aims, inter alia, to tackle a number of labour market related imbalances such as the pay gap between men and women, equal participation of women and men in decision making, the differences in economic independence for women and men and the persisting dilemma of reconciling work and private life.

This document aims at providing some information on the possibilities offered by the ESF for supporting gender equality and gender mainstreaming actions in the context of the new programming period 2007–2013.

## **2. LEGAL BASIS FOR SUPPORT – THE TREATY**

Equality of women and men is a fundamental principle of Community Law and is enshrined as such in the Treaty. According to **Article 2** of the Treaty it is one of the tasks **to be promoted by the Community**. **Article 3** lays down the principle of gender mainstreaming by stating that “in all its activities referred to in this Article, the Community shall aim to eliminate inequalities and to promote equality, between men and women”. Furthermore, **Article 13** provides for pro-active measures “to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion and belief, disability, age or sexual orientation”. Finally, **Articles 137 and 141** stipulate that each Member State shall ensure that “equality between men and women with regard to labour market opportunities and treatment at work” are applied so as “to ensure that the principle of equal pay for male and female workers for equal work or work of equal value”.

According to **the Treaty of Amsterdam** (1997), the gender equality approach is founded on two pillars: **specific actions** (in legislation and programme financing) and gender **mainstreaming** adopted as a tool to better achieve the objectives of European Employment Strategy by integration of the gender issue into every step of the policy processes.

In the framework of the reformed EES and integration into the new Community Lisbon Programme, both the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2005-2008) and the Community Strategic Guidelines 2007-2013 highlight that equal opportunities, combating discrimination and promoting gender mainstreaming are essential for making progress towards achieving full employment, and reducing unemployment and inactivity.

“Within the framework of the Structural Funds, in the **programming period 2000-2006** the **General Regulation (EC) No. 1260/1999 on the Structural Funds** provided for the contribution of the Structural Funds to the promotion of equality between men and women. **Articles 1 and 2** read that “in its efforts to strengthen economic and social cohesion through the Structural Funds, the Community also seeks to promote (...) equality between men and women”, and that the Structural Funds must “help to eliminate inequalities and promote equality between men and women”. Furthermore, the ESF **Regulation 1784/1999** includes among its priorities; under **Art. 2.1 (e)** “specific measures to improve women’s access to and participation in the labour market, including their career development, their access to new job opportunities and to starting up of business, and to reduce vertical and horizontal segregation on the basis of sex in the labour market” and under **Art. 2.2 (c)** “equal opportunities for women and men as part of the mainstreaming approach”. Thus, ESF has been supporting, among others, measures to prevent and combat unemployment, to develop skills and competences, promote entrepreneurship, support access to education and training and facilitated the re-integration with the labour market after long periods of absences (e.g. absences due to maternity leaves).



### 3. STRUCTURAL FUNDS 2007-2013

The **European Social Fund Regulation 1081/2006, Articles 2 and 4.5** refer to the promotion of gender equality. **Art. 3, (b), (iii)** specifies “mainstreaming and specific action to improve access to employment and increase sustainable participation and progress of women in employment, and to eliminate direct and indirect gender-based segregation in the labour market inter alia by addressing the root causes of the gender pay gaps”. **Art. 6** requests Member States to promote, in their operational programmes, gender equality and equal opportunities and to include a description of how this is organised throughout the policy cycle, i.e. in preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. In addition **Art. 10** contains an obligation for Member States to report on the implementation of gender mainstreaming and of any gender specific action.

The **General Regulation for 1083/2006 for the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund dedicates** a specific article (**Art. 16**) to “Equality between men and women and non discrimination”. This Article, laying down general provision for the Structural Funds, states that the Member States and the Commission shall ensure that equality between women and men and the integration of the gender perspective is promoted during the various stages of implementing the funds.

These provisions under Structural Funds Regulations respond to the challenges relating to ensuring equal opportunities for men and women. Despite all efforts gender gaps in terms of education, training, pay, employment, unemployment and career development still exist and progress differs among Member States. Furthermore, women continue to be the primary victims of violence and trafficking. A growing number of women, mainly single mothers, elderly and immigrant women, suffer from poverty and social exclusion. The elimination of gender gaps is therefore a question of both social justice and economic necessity. Gender equality is a key element in generating strong growth and job creation. It is vital to meeting the current demographic challenges of an ageing population, shrinking workforce and falling fertility rates, and it can help to ensure the financial sustainability of social welfare systems. It enables women and men to work and to have fulfilling private lives

### 4. MAIN DIFFERENCES COMPARED WITH THE PREVIOUS PROGRAMMING PERIOD

The Regulations for the 2000-2006 period proposed an integrated equality strategy consisting of specific measures for women and gender mainstreaming in the programmes. This exhaustive, global approach was required in order to ensure that the activities undertaken were not merely isolated measures with limited impact on the general situation in terms of equality.

As in the 2000-2006 period the new ESF regulation for 2007-2013 reflects strongly the EU's commitment to eliminate inequalities between women and men: specific actions aimed at women are combined with a strong gender mainstreaming approach, which means not only having specific activities for women in different fields, but incorporating the gender dimension into all stages of programming and implementation in order to increase women's participation and progress in the world of work. Nevertheless, in 2007-2013 these ESF provisions are reinforced by the specific principle on gender equality in the Regulation common to all Funds.

The aim is to ensure that gender mainstreaming is more effectively applied in all ESF priorities within the frame of a structural approach to gender equality as well as in all other Structural Funds initiatives. This differentiates the new ESF regulations from their predecessors. Gender equality issues are no longer to be addressed as a separate specific priority, within which positive action-oriented activities are developed, but as a cross-cutting principle applicable to all ESF priorities.

However, making gender equality exclusively a cross-cutting principle may bear the risk of overlooking the need for positive actions. Taking gender mainstreaming seriously suggests therefore adopting a **combination of both**. To ensure that the different life situations, needs and interests of women and men are taken into account throughout the programmes, it is necessary to carry out a gender impact assessment in order to identify the possible impact of the intended priorities on women as compared to men. The results of the assessment may reveal huge gender gaps whose bridging is – as outlined earlier – being urged



by the ESF Regulation, the EES and the reformed Lisbon Process. It may therefore be necessary to also establish a framework for positive actions targeted at women and in some cases also at men.

## 5. PROGRAMMING OPTIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION CONSEQUENCES

During the new programming period 2007-2013, the European Commission will support the links between the ESF and the policy framework – the European Employment Strategy – and the employment objectives and targets of the Lisbon strategy for Growth and Jobs. Gender equality policies are essential to reaching the objectives of full employment, quality and productivity at work, social cohesion and social inclusion.

In this framework, the programming strategy of Member States should integrate gender mainstreaming into every step of policy processes, and should be applied as a cross-cutting, horizontal principle, incorporating the gender dimension into all stages of the programming, implementation and evaluation process. In practical terms this should mean that the National Strategic Reference Frameworks (NSRFs) and Operational Programmes (OPs) will contain information on how gender equality is presented under the different priority axes of some of the OPs (e.g. project selection criteria taking into account the gender equality and gender mainstreaming approach, etc.). This means that Member States should be encouraged to adopt appropriate measures to ensure the improvement of gender equality by ESF activities.

Some of the areas within which gender equality may be incorporated include:

- Access to and participation at all levels in the labour market. Removing all employment gaps in the labour market and promoting women's economic independence, promoting women's entrepreneurship, increasing the participation of women in science and technology, in particular in decision making positions, reconciling work, private and family life, giving a fair chance to immigrant women etc.
- Education and training, particularly concerning vocational skills and qualifications and lifelong learning, by encouraging and guiding girls and boys to choose 'non-traditional' education sectors, combating gender stereotypes in professions, providing the exchange of good practices between Member States on ICT and gender best practices through seminars, conferences, the setting up of networks and other activities.
- Ensuring respect for women's rights, ensuring the reconciliation of work and family life and the full enforcement of EU legislation, supporting balanced participation in decision making, supporting research on gender inequalities within discriminated groups and promoting the exchange of good practices.
- Supporting administrative capacity, networking with NGOs, particularly those representing equal opportunity interests, as regards setting up networks, training of members etc.

Some illustrative examples of how the ESF can contribute to improving equality are given in **Annex I**.

The following checklist indicates some useful information on gender equality to include in the plan of the NSRF or OP.

- Gender-disaggregated data and information wherever possible, particularly concerning participation in the labour market, unemployment rates, service provision, education and training etc.;
- Description of the objectives as regards reducing inequalities and improving equality between women and men and how the choice of priority axis will contribute to the equality objectives;
- Indication, if relevant, of financial allocation for addressing gender mainstreaming issues;
- Presentation of specific indicators and targets for monitoring improved equality;
- Presentation of specific arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the gender mainstreaming action by the Management Authorities;



- Presentation of the measures taken to publicise the priorities selected and to inform organisations and other bodies concerned.

Member States or other bodies interested in programming and implementing NSRF, OPs and projects within a gender mainstreaming approach can consult the report developed by the ad hoc working group of Equal Managing Authorities **“A Framework for integrating the principle of Gender Equality in the new ESF programmes”**. Checklists in Annex 1 of the report summarise the principal requirements concerning the integration of gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the new programming documents (NSRF and OP’s).

## 6. POTENTIAL PROBLEMATIC ISSUES

Where gender-segregated statistics are not available, it is impossible to have an overview of the implementation of the different gender actions. Further development of indicators and comparable data on gender equality and statistics broken down by sex for all European Member States is necessary to ensure accurate evaluation of actions for gender equality in all European countries.

In the context of mainstreamed approach, there is a need for improvement of monitoring and reporting on the impact of ESF. Efficient monitoring needs an appropriate definition of objectives by Member States in the design of the NSRF and selection criteria for projects at the OP level. Proper indicators and benchmarks should be set and evaluation procedures (internal or external) should take into account the improvement of gender issues.

**ANNEX I – Table 1: Possible contributions of ESF to Gender Equality**

<p>Improved access to, and participation at all levels, in labour market</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved participation of women in labour market measures leading to employment in technical professions</li> <li>• Support to companies and organisations which develop and implement employment equality plans</li> <li>• Support to companies to improve the qualifications and working conditions of part-time and atypical workers</li> <li>• Promotion of women as employees and managers in research and development, technology and innovation</li> <li>• Promotion of men into service professions through training and labour market measures</li> <li>• Measures to support the increased participation of women at all professional levels in growth sectors, such as tourism environment, telecommunications and biotechnology</li> </ul>
--	---



<p>Improved equality in education and training, particularly in vocational skills and qualifications</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improved participation of women in vocational training measures leading to technical qualifications and professions</li><li>• Improved participation of women in IT training courses particularly at higher levels</li><li>• Promotion of men's participation in training measures leading to service sector employment</li><li>• Improved flexibility of delivery of education and vocational training measures to reach women in rural areas or without easy access to transport</li></ul>
<p>Improved participation of women in enterprise creation and growth</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Awareness-raising and training measures on equality for managers and advisors of enterprise support services</li><li>• Reorientation and design of SME support services (financial and technical) to better meet the needs of women wishing to start and develop a business</li><li>• Improved financial services for women starting and developing businesses</li><li>• Support for networks and associations of women business owners, and for mentoring activities by and for women</li><li>• Special support to women to establish and develop businesses in telecommunications and high technology fields</li><li>• Support for women as promoters and managers of social economy initiatives</li></ul>
<p>Reconciliation of work and family life</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support for care services for children and other dependants and for the training and qualification of care workers</li><li>• Support to employers who offer their employees career breaks, childcare and other family support services</li><li>• Improved access to training and job opportunities for women and men with restricted mobility, through support for teleworking or homeworking etc.</li></ul>



<p>Improved participation of women in decision-making.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Balanced participation of women and men in monitoring committees and partnerships responsible for managing Programming Documents</li><li>• Involvement of equality bodies and women's organisations in monitoring committees, partnerships and other forum during the programming period</li><li>• Promotion of women into managerial and decision-making positions in the structures for managing assistance and implementing operations</li><li>• Regular consultation with organisations representing equality interests throughout the programming period</li><li>• Provision of information and support to women's organisations and networks to encourage participation as project promoters</li></ul>
--	--



The full version of the above text is available at:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/esf/fields/woman\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf/fields/woman_en.htm)



**For more information:**

Information service of DG Employment, Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities  
Communication Unit  
B-1049 Brussels  
Fax.: +32 2 296 23 93  
E-mail: [empl-info@ec.europa.eu](mailto:empl-info@ec.europa.eu)  
<http://ec.europa.eu/esf>